

# **SIouxLAND** **BusinessJournal**

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**May 2002**

from the editor ... about this issue

It's difficult to imagine what it would be like to be locked away for nearly six years in a foreign military prison. Denied proper medical treatment. Given little to eat or drink. Beaten and tortured repeatedly. From day to day, not knowing whether you'll live or die. Wondering if you'll ever again see your loving wife and four small children.



For 67 months, from August 1967 to March 1973, Col. George "Bud" Day lived through such a nightmare. Though the conditions were brutal, he persevered. In 1976, his country acknowledged his gallant leadership, awarding him the nation's highest military citation - the Medal of Honor. On May 25, Day's hometown of Sioux City will honor him as well, with a ceremony dedicating the air field that now bears his name.

A profile on the retired colonel begins on page 20 and runs through page 23. We're devoted more space than we normally do for a cover story. But we think Day's remarkable story certainly warrants it.

**Dave Dreeszen** | [e-mail](#)

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### Cover Story

A soldier's story

Medal of Honor winner Col. Bud Day endured 67 months of captivity during Vietnam War

He served his country in three wars during a military career that spanned 34 years. The nation's most highly decorated officer since Gen. Douglas MacArthur, he holds more than 50 combat awards, including the nation's highest military citation -- the Medal of Honor.



Shot down over North Vietnam in 1967, he spent nearly six years in Prisoner of War camps, enduring repeated abuse and torture by his captors. He managed to escape and evade the enemy for 14 days, only to be recaptured and brutalized even more.

Col. George E. "Bud" Day is truly an American hero.

The Sioux City native, now 77, acknowledged he "gets called that a lot," but doesn't necessarily agree with the label.

"I've never really considered myself to be that big of a departure from the troops I led," Day said in an interview from his law office in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. "I flew a significant amount of combat, and I saw some extremely brave, courageous things done in the air and on the ground. It's pretty hard to take a look at yourself and say, 'My conduct was so much better than that guy, or my conduct is so easy to separate from his.' "

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## Cover Story

A soldier's story

Medal of Honor winner Col. Bud Day endured 67 months of captivity during Vietnam War

By [Dave Dreeszen](#)

Business Journal Editor | [E-mail](#)

A Vietnam War-era **Col. George "Bud" Day** is depicted in artwork created by Lt. Col. R. L. Fechter of the 185th Fighter Wing. "Misty" refers to the Misty Super (FAC) unit that Day commanded in South Vietnam. 67 refers to the number of missions he flew, as well as the year, 1967, he was captured by the North Vietnamese, and the number of months he spent as a POW. In the right hand corner is a representation of his Medal of Honor.



He served his country in three wars during a military career that spanned 34 years. The nation's most highly decorated officer since Gen. Douglas MacArthur, he holds more than 50 combat awards, including the nation's highest military citation -- the Medal of Honor.

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Last October, Sioux City officials paid tribute to their hometown hero, renaming the city's airport "Sioux Gateway Airport/Col. Bud Day Field." Day will be formally honored at a May 25 dedication ceremony at the airport.

The retired colonel said he was "astonished, and certainly very humbled" when he learned of the efforts to attach his name to the airport, which is home to the 185th Fighter Wing, Iowa Air National Guard.

"I guess I'd have to say I was pretty close to speechless," he recalled. "It's an incredible honor for both me and my family."

Many local officials say the tribute is long overdue.

Master Sgt. John Sandman of the 185th Fighter Wing, and Brendan Burchard, who recently retired from the 185th, were the driving forces behind the Iowa Air National Guard unit's efforts to rename the airport. Burchard, who now teaches at Sioux City Heelan High School, says he regularly tells his students about Day.

"They haven't heard of him," Burchard told the City Council earlier this year. "I said that's not their fault. He's a pretty well-kept secret."

### Early military career

Born Feb. 24, 1925, Day grew up in Sioux City's Riverside area. In 1942, he dropped out of Central High School his senior year to join the Marines. He served 30 months in the South Pacific during World War II as a non-commissioned officer.

After the war, he returned to Sioux City and enrolled at Morningside College, where he earned his undergraduate degree in English and history. He also obtained his law degree from the University of South Dakota.

In 1946, he joined the National Guard, and four years later received an appointment as a second lieutenant. He was called to active duty in the Air Force in 1951, and began training as a jet pilot.

After the U.S. entered the Korean Conflict, he served two tours in the Far East as a fighter-bomber pilot. In 1957, he became the first pilot to survive a "no chute" bailout, after ejecting from a burning jet fighter in England.

### Vietnam War

In April 1967, Major Day, then 42, was assigned to the 31st Tac Fighter Wing at Tuy Hoa Air Base in South Vietnam. Shortly afterwards, he was transferred to the Phu Cat Air Base, where he organized and became the first commander of the "Misty Super FAC's" F-100 squadron, which flew secret missions during the war. At the time, he was one of the nation's most experienced fighter pilots, with more than 5,000 hours of flying time.

On, Aug. 26, 1967, Day took off on a mission to destroy a Surface to Air Mission (SAM) site in North Vietnam. The pilot was Capt. Corwin Kippenham, an Amana, Iowa, native. Day, the instructor pilot and forward air controller, was seated in the back of the F-100, dubbed "Misty 31 Bravo."

The target was so well camouflaged that Kippenham and Day couldn't locate it during

their first pass. They made a second pass about two hours later.

"As we popped over this mountain ridge, I could see the shadow of one of the missiles and I could see the corner of the radar vent," Day recalled. "Just as we got over the target, we got hit with anti-aircraft fire, which put the aircraft out of control."

Day punched himself and Kippenham out of the aircraft. A U.S. helicopter crew rescued Kippenham, who landed about a 1 1/2 miles south of Day. By the time U.S. forces, who were taking heavy fire, reached Day's position, he was already gone.

"When I woke up, almost immediately, there was a young Vietnamese with a rifle in my face, and I was instantly captured," he recalled.

In the bailout, Day was badly broken up, suffering three fractures of his right arm, a severely wrenched knee, a damaged eye a mangled face. But from the first day, he thought of nothing but escape.

### **Brutal confinement**

Refusing to answer his captors questions, he was beaten repeatedly. At one point, he was hung upside down for hours by a rope tied around his ankles.

Imprisoned in a hole in the ground, Day plotted his escape plan. Feigning a back injury, he lulled his guards into complacency, and eventually escaped into the jungle.

For 14 days, he worked his way south, surviving on little food, water or sleep. After reaching the Ben Hai River, he crossed the river with a bamboo log float, and entered the demilitarized zone. Due to delirium, he lost his sense of direction and wandered aimlessly for several days. But, by Sept. 11, he came within about a mile of a Marine base in South Vietnam. Confronted by a Viet Cong soldier, Day, in his weakened physical condition, said he could not immediately tell if the man was friendly or not. "When I finally figured it out, I just decided to take off and run, and he shot me," he recalled.

Thus, Day became the first - and only - U.S. POW to escape from a North Vietnamese prison, only to be recaptured by the Viet Cong in the south.

Back in captivity, he was refused treatment for his gunshot wound and other injuries. And, the worst was yet to come.

### **Gallant resistance**

With his captors angered by his escape, Day was subjected to even more beatings and torture. He was hung by his arms, a particularly painful form of torture that American doctors later compared to Christ's crucifixion. Day's weight dropped from his normal weight of 170 pounds to 110.

Ever defiant, he continued to offer resist the enemy's interrogations, gallantry refusing to cooperate, or provide any information that might endanger other soldiers.

Day was confined in the "Hanoi Hilton," and other infamous North Vietnamese prisons, at times serving as the camp commander. For a number of months, he shared a cell with Navy pilot John McCain, today a Republican U.S. senator from Arizona. In his recent book, "Faith of Our Fathers," McCain said Day endured more abuse from the enemy than any POW.

## Keeping the faith

Day said his religious faith and love for his wife, Doris, and their four children helped get him through the long, painful ordeal. "I had a strong belief in God," he said. "I had a strong belief that everything was OK with my wife at home. I was positive that my country was going to come get me. I just didn't realize it was going to take me so long."

In December 1972, President Nixon ordered a massive bombing raid on Hanoi, which Day said brought the North Vietnamese "to their knees." "Every airplane in Southeast Asia wound up over Hanoi. Bombs were falling every two to three minutes all day long the next day and the next night," Day recalled. "We knew we were free then."

On March 14, 1973, Day walked out of prison, ending 67 months of captivity. Three days later, he reunited with his family at a California Air Force base. "That was certainly one of the most wonderful days of my life," he said.

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Major **George "Bud" Day** prepares to embrace his wife, Doris, after stepping off the plane at March Air Force Base in California. After 67 months as a POW in North Vietnam, Bud Day was reunited with Doris and their four children on March 17, 1973.

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## Medal of Honor

After a short recuperative period, Day returned to active flying status. In December 1974, he was invited back to South Vietnam and awarded the country's highest medal by President Thieu. And, on March 14, 1974, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Ford at a White House ceremony. At Day's request, Nixon also presented the medal at a later ceremony.

Sioux City's only Medal of Honor winner, Day described the award as humbling. "The idea that you would get the same medal as a Jimmy Doolittle and Charles Lindberg is a little hard to believe," he said. "My own conduct didn't impress me to the point where I ever expected I was going to receive a Medal of Honor."

After retiring from the Air Force in 1977, Day returned to the legal profession. He also became a lecturer on politics and war, and wrote his autobiography, "Return with Honor."

As a trial lawyer, he has been a strong advocate for Veterans' rights. In February 2001, he won a major victory when a Federal Circuit Court of Appeals agreed the federal government had breached its contract to provide free lifetime medical care for World War II and Korean-era retirees and their spouses. The ruling is under appeal.

Day also has campaigned extensively for GOP candidates, including Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, and his longtime friend McCain.

## Lifetime love affair

Bud and his childhood sweetheart, the former Doris Merlene Sorensen, whom Bud



affectionately refers to as "Viking," are celebrating their 53rd wedding anniversary this month. The couple, who live in Shalimar, Fla., have two sons - Steven Michael of Pensacola, Fla., and Lot. Col. George Everette, Jr., a F-16 pilot stationed at the Pentagon - twin daughters, Sonja Smith of Shalimar and Sandra Mathers of Monroe, La. - as well as 10 grandchildren.

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**President Ford** meets with **Col. Bud Day**, his wife, **Doris**, and their four children, **George Jr.** and **Stephen**, and twins **Sonja** and **Sandra**. Ford presented Day with the Medal of Honor at the White House on March 14, 1976.

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Though he left Sioux City nearly more than a half century ago, Day hasn't forgotten his hometown. Last fall, he was presented with a "Distinguished Alumni" award at his alma mater Morningside College. An avid outdoorsman, Day also enjoys returning to Siouxland to fish and hunt for game such as pheasant, ducks and geese.

"I've hunted and fished almost every place there is to hunt or fish up there," he said.

The region continues to hold a special place in his heart.

"I have extremely fond memories of Sioux City and the geography up there," he said. "It's a great place."

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Former POWs to attend Day's airport dedication ceremony

By [Dave Dreeszen](#)

Business Journal Editor | [E-mail](#)

Col. George "Bud" Day will be joined by many other former POWs when Sioux City honors the Vietnam War hero on Saturday, May 25.

Texas businessman H. Ross Perot, a longtime Day friend and POW advocate, also will attend the dedication of "Sioux Gateway Airport/Col. Bud Day Field."

Local officials last October renamed the airport to recognize their hometown hero Day, Sioux City's only winner of the Medal of Honor. Shot down over North Vietnam in 1967, he endured 67 months of brutal imprisonment.

From 16 to 20 former POWs invited by Day are expected to accompany Perot to the dedication, said Major Stephanie Samenus, a spokeswoman for the 185th Fighter Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, which is coordinating the ceremony. The former POWs will gather Thursday night at Perot's ranch near Houston for a reunion and barbeque, Samenus said. They then will board Perot's private jet for a flight to Sioux City, arriving shortly before the 1 p.m. ceremony.

Day, who will not attend the Texas barbeque, is scheduled to arrive in Sioux City Thursday, Samenus said.

Perot is arranging the sculpture of a 9-foot-tall bronze statue of a Vietnam-era Day in his flight suit, Samenus said. The statue will be mounted on a 4 1/2 tall granite pedestal near the main entrance of the terminal. The statue will not be finished by the dedication, and will be unveiled at a later date, she said.

Originally, local officials had hoped to sculpt a simple bust of Day for display in the terminal, but had trouble raising the needed \$10,000, Samenus said. The billionaire Perot then stepped forward. He suggested enlarging the scope of the project, and told local officials not to worry about the cost. According to Perot, former POWs who served under Day are financing the project, Samenus said.

During the Vietnam War, Perot headed an investigation of brutal treatment of U.S. POWs. Day came to Perot's attention after hearing how Day led his fellow POWs in a singing of the Star Spangled Banner. Day defied his captors by singing the patriotic song after some POWs who had led a prison church service were taken away by the guards.

Following the war, Day and Perot met at a POW reunion, and struck up a friendship that continues to this day. In fact, Perot was first on the list of invitees Day gave to organizers of Saturday's ceremony, Samenus said.

In addition to Perot, Saturday's speaker will include retired Lt. Col. Orson Swindle, and retired Lt. COL. Bill Douglas. Swindle, a former POW who served with Day, now serves on the Federal Trade Commission. Douglas is a former F-100 jet pilot who served in the Misty Super Forward Air Control (FAC) unit that Day commanded in South Vietnam.

An audio recording from U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who shared a cell with Day during his imprisonment, also will be played at the ceremony.

A F-100 - like the one Day flew on the mission in which he was shot down over North Vietnam - will be featured in a fly over the airport. The privately-owned jet, flown by Dean Cutshell of Indiana, then will land at the airport. A B-1 bomber from the the Ellsworth Air Force base in South Dakota, and a squadron of F-16s flown by pilots at the 185th Fighter Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, also will fly over the airport.

The dedication, which be held outside the Great West Casualty hangar, is open to the public. Visitors are encouraged to view a portable display case, which will hold Vietnam-era artifacts, including Day's flight suit and the pajamas he wore in prison.

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Sioux Gateway Airport/Col. Bud Day Field  
dedication schedule of events

Saturday, May 25  
1 p.m.  
Great West Casualty hangar

**Prelude**  
East High School Band  
Directed by Russ Nagle

**Presentation of Colors**  
185th Fighter Wing Honor



Guard

**National Anthem**

Lt. Col. Steve Rowe  
Major Dave Simon,  
Major Joe Ascherl  
Senior Master Sgt. Don Keeler

**Pledge of allegiance**

Sioux City Young Ambassadors

**Fly Over**

B1 Bomber from Ellsworth  
Air Force Base, S.D.  
185th Fighter Wing, F-16s in  
"Missing Man" formation  
F-100 flown by Dean Cutshell

**Presentation of POW flag and narrative**

Chief Master Sgt. Merlin  
Thompson  
Senior Master Sgt. Don Keeler

**Welcome and proclamation**

Mayor Craig Berenstein

**Remarks**

Major Gen. Ron Dardis,  
adjutant general of Iowa  
U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.,  
(audio recording)  
Lt. Col. Bill Douglass, retired  
Lt. Col. Orson Swindle, retired  
Ross Perot  
Col. George "Bud" Day, retired

**Solo: "God Bless the USA"**

Kevin Keane

**Presentation**

Col. John Janson, commander,  
185th Fighter Wing  
Mayor Craig Berenstein

**Ribbon cutting**

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515 Pavonia Street  
P.O. Box 118  
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